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ABSTRACT

This is a brief personal review of the Rutgers University urban internship program which is operated in conjunction with the New Jersey Urban Education Corps. The purpose of the program is to prepare liberal arts graduates to be secondary school teachers in urban areas. The recruiting of the interns took place mostly at black colleges and universities and among Peace Corpsmen and Vista Volunteers. The 46 interns with whom the program began in June 1970 were almost evenly divided between blacks and whites. Social science majors predominated. During the summer phase the interns worked with community and school groups in the cities in which they would be teaching. This practical work experience was supplemented with seminars on contemporary urban culture and the adolescent subculture therein. The interns in Newark worked with a Catholic Church group in the central ward on a tutorial and recreational program for high school and elementary school students. In the fall 1970 semester the interns did supervised half-day teaching in the school systems. In addition, they took four graduate courses at Rutgers consisting of: 1) a practicum in urban schools and communities; 2) a practicum in the teaching of the subject specialty to urban students; 3) a research and theory course on urban education; and, 4) a course in the intern's subject major. (SBE)

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PREPARING URBAN HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS

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SP 000 570

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This is really a report on the Rutgers University urban internship program, which began at the start of the summer and will continue through next semester. It is also one person's report and does not necessarily reflect the opinion of others involved in the Rutgers program. The purpose of the program is to prepare liberal arts graduates to be secondary school teachers in urban areas.

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First, it should be mentioned that the Rutgers program is operated in conjunction with the New Jersey Urban Education Corps, which is the state agency which provides the funding and which also does the initial recruiting of interns for the program.

The recruiting of this year's interns took place mostly at black colleges and universities and among Peace Corpsmen and Vista Volunteers. Since urban teaching increasingly means black ghetto teaching, it was felt that blacks should be the focus of the recruitment, both as recruits and as recruiters. However, regardless of the recruit's race, he was selected at least partly on the basis of having demonstrated some social commitment, either in his home community, the community near his college, or in the Peace Corps or Vista. Of course, recruits were also chosen for their ability to do graduate level study.

The forty-six interns with whom we began in June were almost evenly divided between blacks and whites. We also tried to get a subject major balance among the interns. However, social science majors predominate because they are the ones most likely to be attracted to a program of this sort.

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The purpose of the summer phase of the program was to get the interns ready for half-time teaching positions they assumed in the Newark and Plainfield school systems as of September. The best way to do this, we thought, was to have the interns work with community and school groups in the cities in which they would be teaching. A couple of the interns thought that since they were black or had already done community work elsewhere, this requirement should be waived for them. Our response was that we did not share Agnew's notion that if you've seen one slum, you've seen them all.

The practical work experience was supplemented with seminars on contemporary urban culture and the adolescent subculture therein. The interns heard from a variety of government and community people who work with youth, as well as from high school students themselves. There was no required reading,

but a lengthy categorized bibliography of recommended readings was given to the interns.

Before the summer session began, an unexpected opportunity arose. A Catholic Church group in the central ward of Newark decided to conduct a tutorial and recreational program for high school and elementary school students. Rutgers interns who worked in this program were allowed to live in two old houses which the Church owned in the Newark central ward. Thus, the interns not only had the experience of working in the community but also of living there. For this reason, as many interns as were interested and could be accomodated were assigned to work with the Catholic Church group. The remaining interns were placed in Upward Bound programs and in public school programs. A third old house in the central ward was later rented by a group of the interns on their own.

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Now let me recount some of the most significant occurrences of the summer.

First of all, the Catholic Church group entered into alliances with some community groups, and there soon came to be an umbrella organization known as the Soul Unification Network, which could claim to represent a good number of the ghetto poor.

This larger organization decided to secure land and equipment with which to provide recreational programs to the youngsters of the central ward. There was, of course, no money with which to pay for either the land or the equipment, so both had to come in the form of donations from the establishment. At this point, the interns received practical lessons in the frustrations of the poor. While some private and public agencies that were approached cooperated eagerly, there were others which had obviously mastered the art of putting off people. There was one large government body in particular which appeared to operate with a practiced cynicism. (I will not name this body because to do so could jeopardize the continuation of the Rutgers intern program in Newark.) At any rate, an appointment was made to present our case to the head of this organization. When the Soul Unification Network representatives and the Rutgers interns arrived for the appointment, they were ushered into a conference room and told to wait. After a time, one of the organization underlings, who was scheduled to retire in three days, came in and proceeded to enlighten us with a forty minute history of the organization. He said that due to his imminent retirement, he was in no position to hear our requests. After an hour had elapsed, a secretary entered to

inform us that the head of the organization had gone to lunch and would not be back for at least ninety minutes. We then decided to carry our case to the governing board of the organization and arranged to be placed on the agenda for the next board meeting. Shortly before this meeting was to commence, we were notified that we had been dropped from the agenda because our business could more properly be taken up with the head of the organization! All we wanted was the use of some public equipment which was not being used, but apparently the public, or at least the poor public, were not to be trusted with the equipment. Despite these disappointments, the Soul Unification Network, with the help of the Rutgers interns, did succeed in producing a twelve-hour entertainment festival, which was attended by thousands of people in the central ward. Some small scale recreational programs were also carried out.

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There was another distressing but educational experience for the interns during the summer. The component organizations of the Soul Unification Network descended into extremely acrimonious relations with each other. The trouble revolved around the role of the Catholic Church group. This organization was run by white clerics. The leaders of the other organizations,

who were black, claimed that these white clerics should subject themselves to community control. The clerics insisted that they were willing to do so, but no convincing evidence to this effect was forthcoming. The blacks began to feel that "a game was being run" on them and the community. The white clergy suspected that the blacks were trying to "guerilla in" on their operation.

Caught in the middle were the Rutgers interns, who wanted to remain above these organizational rivalries and tended to view both sides with impatience. Eventually the Catholic Church group withdrew from the Soul Unification Network, so the interns were forced to make a choice as to the organization with which they would continue working. Most of the white interns went with the white church group, and most of the black interns went with the black groups. The interns were allowed to stay in the church-owned houses, regardless of their choice, until the end of the summer program.

Again, it was a frustrating experience for the interns but an educational one, and hardly the kind of experience that could be programed even if we had wished to do so.

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As some of the previous remarks suggest, there was an estrangement between the black and white interns. In fact,

there was a mounting mutual resentment that took some time to flare into the open. The black interns doubted the sincerity of the white interns. It was suspected that the whites were in the program to assuage personal guilt, or to beat the draft, or to pick up a master's degree and certification, or to vent their sense of superiority among the people they were supposed to be helping. The whites were asked why they had not remained in their suburban enclaves to combat the racism there. In reply, the whites accused the blacks of prejudging them and of not giving them a chance to demonstrate their sincerity. It was also suggested that the motivations of the blacks were not above question.

A key to this antagonism can be found in the case of the white intern who was <u>most</u> accepted by the blacks. This person was very free and open and had a wry, self-deprecating sense of humor. In other words, he was not all uptight and tense about his "mission," and he could socialize comfortably with the black interns. Some of the white interns had had no prolonged and intimate contact with blacks before, and they were strained and awkward in their encounters. They tried too hard. They gave the impression that they felt morally obliged to do their damnedest to understand and get along with black folk. As a

result, they were responding to the blacks as objects, and sometimes as strange, unfathomable objects at that. As one of the black interns put it, she did not care to be studied, and she had gotten to the point where she half expected one of the white interns to burst into the bathroom and ask to observe the way she brushed her teeth. The point here seems to be that even if whites are well-intentioned and willing to learn, their ignorance is increasingly offensive to blacks.

The heated discussions of the racial issue among the interns were but another of the painful experiences in the program. The value of these discussions is indisputable, but it would have been better to elicit the discussions before the ill feelings had festered for so long.

Some other painful experiences which were sustained by the interns concerned one intern whose luggage was stolen from the car as she was preparing to move into one of the residence houses, and another intern who was robbed on the street. The latter person actually lost very little, since the Rutgers interns live at the subsistence level.

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The interns are now doing supervised half-day teaching in the Newark and Plainfield school systems. In addition, they are

taking four graduate courses at Rutgers. The courses consist of a practicum in urban schools and communities, a practicum in the teaching of the subject specialty to urban students, a research and theory course on urban education, and a course in the intern's subject major. A similar pattern will be followed next semester.

The interns are finding their teaching experience to be an aggravation, typified by: lots of students, a dearth of materials, a rigid atmosphere, and goals which many of their students, especially at the junior high level, perceive to be downright silly. The responses of the interns to this situation cover a wide spectrum of pedagogical persuasions. Some are radicals who think it is stupid to discuss ways of coping with an impossible condition. They fear that they are perpetuating an evil by working with it. Their recommendation is that the system be dismantled and replaced with small, humane, autonomous schools, and that means be devised for accomplishing this.

At the other extreme are interns who consider such talk to be wastefully utopian. Their concern is with surviving and contributing in their present teaching situation. They deem it irresponsible to spend time envisioning alternatives to the system when there are students who have to be salvaged now under the existing institutional constraints.

Each group has its supporters among the Rutgers faculty, as

well as a middle group who would like to maintain a balance between the two emphases.

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A final word. There are not as many interns now as there were in June. Some could not bring themselves to return in the fall; others came back but found they could not stay. Those who are still at it, and with it, are remarkable for their flexibility, resilience, and dedication. These may be the most important traits they will take with them from the program; but the program has not given these characteristics to the interns - they came with them.